

LMC adds map technology program

Officials say it's a job growth area

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BENTON HARBOR — Looking for a career that blends computer skills and mapping technology, plus the chance to earn \$60,000 a year?

That's the essence of the college's new geospatial information science and technology program, which Lake Michigan College board members unanimously approved Tuesday night.

"We're one of a few community colleges in the state, and certainly in the country, to have that program," said Leslie Kellogg, LMC's vice president of academic services (career and work force education). "It is a credential that many students from different disciplines can use — business, criminal justice, logistics — because

it's applicable in pretty much any industry."

Starting this summer, LMC will offer the new program as a certificate, as part of its computer information science coursework options, Kellogg said after the board meeting.

Students can take the program as a stand-alone certificate, which takes a year to complete — or as an add-on certificate "to give them a real strong edge in the work force," if they're going for an associate's degree, Kellogg said.

The GIST program ranks among the U.S. Department of Labor's "top three growth sectors" in the work place, Kellogg told the board.

Students would benefit by getting an associate's degree in computer information systems and programming, for example — as well as the GIST certificate, Kellogg said.

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“It will give them an advantage in their field. That (combination) is extremely marketable, and you could command a \$60,000 salary pretty easily,” she said.

GIST technology is mainly used in a decision-making context, Kellogg said.

“It’s a blending of database and mapping technology,” Kellogg said. “It is using maps and a lot of data to create visual and graphic information ... for example, the movement of contaminants through groundwater tables over time. That’s something you can see.”

Other examples include siting for a new business.

“You put in demographics like median income, consumer behaviors and traffic patterns ... where is a good place to put the next coffeeshop, that kind of thing,” Kellogg said.

Sixteen students have signed up for the first classes this summer, which has exceeded LMC’s initial expectations, Kellogg said.

“Usually, you don’t get that kind of enrollment (in a summer class) – and that’s without any marketing, at this point,” Kellogg said. “I think we’re going to find it to be a very successful program.”

Board members unanimously agreed to create a pharmacy technician program, which students can take either for a certificate or an associate’s degree.

LMC had been offering the program since the fall 2012 semester, but only as a non-credit option, Kellogg said.

All that changed with a state mandate in December 2014.

“The state required that all pharmacy technicians had to be licensed. That created additional content that really makes it difficult to do in a short-term training format,” Kellogg said. “So it really made sense to move it to a credit-bearing program.”

Trustee Paul Bergan expressed satisfaction at seeing the change taking place.

“It’s great to see it come for credit here at the college, and as an additional pathway for people in health sciences to explore the future,” he said.

The program will prepare students to sit for the state exam that newly minted pharmacy technicians must pass before starting their careers, Kellogg said.

Key emphasis areas will include communications skills, health math, medical terminology and accuracy in dispensing and controlling drugs, according to a memo in Tuesday’s board packet.